

A MESSAGE TO THE MEMBERS, Pt. 2 2 CORINTHIANS 4

Two weeks ago: Message from the Pastor, Eph. 4.11-16

Last week: Message to the Members, Acts 2.42; 1 John 1.7 –
The Meaning of Fellowship

Today: Message to the Members, Part 2, 2 Cor. 4

This has been a challenging week for our church. In fact, the last few weeks and even months have been a challenge that we could hardly have foreseen

But this week has also been a watershed week for our church – a turning point – a week when we overcame some hurdles and some obstacles that were preventing us from accomplishing the mission that God has for His church – namely, to reach the nations with the Gospel.

If you were here on Wednesday night for our family meeting, you heard the hearts of our people as each expressed a desire to move forward in spite of the barriers that come into our path.

It is easy to get discouraged when there seems to be no relief in sight, and we have had people leave our fellowship because they could see no end of conflict.

I have to admit that I have experienced those same feelings this week. There were times my heart was broken and I struggled to stay focused on the task of being your pastor.

But through much prayer and with the counsel of several mentors and the support of you who are faithful to God's call, I have become stronger having had to deal with the adversity.

Dr. Charles Clark, the Director of Missions for Flint River Baptist Association, was with us on Wednesday evening, as many of you know who were here. In response to our family meeting that night, Dr. Clark wrote this to me in an email:

A consensus was reached. There was unanimity (perhaps for the first time in years) in that family gathering. Everyone needs to know, think, believe, and act like God was sought; His Will was revealed; His people affirmed their desire to move on toward the future. That core of people present Wednesday night **IS DAYSPRING** whether anyone else is a part of it or not; whether it is in that building or somewhere else, whether others like it or not. If you have to abandon, scratch off, or otherwise “start all over” to accomplish God's directive, do it. (The Lord spoke to your people and they responded.) Your church did not need an “official” business meeting to make a spiritual decision. Shepherd that church faithfully and to the best of your God-given ability.

That email came through at a time when I really needed it. As I started to write a reply to Dr. Clark, a scripture came to mind that I want to read to you this morning in the way of encouragement.

If you have your Bibles, turn with me to 2 Corinthians 4.

I am going to read the whole chapter, and I am going to be reading from the NLT. If it is too confusing to try to follow your version and listen to mine, just listen and be encouraged by what Paul wrote to the church at Corinth.

If ever a church had struggles, it was Corinth. There was sin in their church and division and strife and rebellion against the teachings of Paul and other spiritual leaders. At times, Paul lost his temper and spoke harshly to the members of the church at Corinth. Some members were apparently expelled because of the continuing conflict that resulted from their behavior.

So the church at Corinth was discouraged. Paul's heart was broken for them, so he wrote with a firm, but soft pen in this letter to make sure that those who remained faithful realized that, not only did he love them, but God loved them even more.

Verses 1-2

If God has ordained this church to be, then why would I abandon it? If this is my ministry and things begin to go sour, then it might be worth quitting. But if this is God's ministry – if God has called

this church into existence and has a distinct purpose for its existence, and I am a servant of God, then how can I do anything that harms or inhibits its mission?

There is no room for deceit and working behind the scenes and dishonesty among God's people.

We must "tell the truth before God" as well as before each other.

Verses 3-5

Notice how Paul defined the Good News – the Gospel.

When we discuss the Gospel, more often than not, our emphasis is on Man's sin and forgiveness and the gift of eternal life.

So our key verse is **John 3.16**, which we tend to read like this:

God loved the world – He loved me – so much that He gave His only begotten Son so that if I choose to believe in Him, I get to escape the penalty and the judgment of sin and get the gift of a life that begins when I believe and lasts forever.

We make man – ourselves – the central character in the verse.

But at the end of verse 4 and in verse 5, Paul defined what is meant by the gospel.

Read 4b-5a.

Now when we re-read **John 3.16** in light of the sovereignty of God instead of the sin of man, we read it like this:

God loved with the kind of love that led Him to offer as a sacrifice His only begotten Son – Jesus. When I believe – when I acknowledge that Jesus is Lord and the light of the world – I am redeemed from the penalty and the judgment of sin, I am made a new creation, Christ takes up residence in my heart, and I receive the kind of life that God has – eternity life.

This is not a life that begins one day and lasts forever, but the kind of life that exists only in eternity. It is the kind of life that God

has – that Jesus has – life that is beyond the limits of time and space and matter.

When we talk about salvation, we put great emphasis on the confession of sin. And confession of sin is part of the process.

Yet there is much greater emphasis on our confession of Christ than on our confession of our sin, because confession of sin without the confession of the lordship of Christ is fruitless and useless.

Rom. 10.9-10; 14.11; 15.9

Phil. 2.9-11

1 Jn. 4.15

Listen to what Paul said in Philippians concerning his desire to become like Christ.

Philippians 3:10 For it is my determined purpose that I may know Him, that I may progressively become more deeply and intimately acquainted with Him, perceiving and recognizing and understanding the wonders of His Person more strongly and more clearly, and that I may in that same way come to know the power outflowing from His resurrection which it exerts over believers, and that I may so share His sufferings as to be continually transformed in spirit into His likeness even to His death.

Verse 6

But Paul does not stop with simply defining the Gospel as the light of Christ which reveals the glory of God.

He goes on to let us know that this has been the theme of the Bible from the very beginning of time.

Gen. 1.1-3

The earth was dark, and void, and formless.

God brought Light into the world. There was no sun, nor moon, nor stars, so what was this light? Paul is here explaining that this light that brought life to the world was Christ himself.

The plan of redemption existed before the foundation of the world and God set the world in motion and set men in that creation so that His wonderful plan of redemption could be fulfilled in the lives of those men.

1 Cor. 15.1-8

The Gospel is the good news of the light of Christ which reveals to all men the glory of God.

Verse 7

Where do we find this priceless treasure of the light of Christ? It is stored in a fragile vessel made of clay. The Pearl of Heaven is stored within a clay pot.

Just think about the stark contrast Paul is painting between the contents and the container.

I am sure you all know about flower pots – how fragile they are – how prone they are to break when they run into some obstacle or when we drop them or when they bump into one another.

Just hit two clay pots against one another and watch them shatter. Yet we can't understand how individual Christians can't get along with one another without conflict. It is because of the nature of clay.

We do not buy clay pots for our flowers because we want people to pay attention to our pots do we? We plant and water and fertilize and prune and then display the flowers, not the pots.

Why, many times, we even cover the pots with foil or pretty paper to keep the ordinary clay pot from detracting from the beauty of the flower.

The earthen vessel is common and cheap and fragile and easily broken.

It has nothing of which to boast and no reason for feeling superior. Why? Because it isn't about the pots, but the treasure that is in the pot.

The treasure certainly does not gain anything from the pot.

And there are times when it is the best thing for the treasure when the pot is broken.

Judges 7.15-22

This is the story of Gideon, a man God used to defeat the enemies of Israel. God allowed Gideon to have an army of only 300 men to go up against the Midianites.

On the day of the battle, Gideon called on his men...

"Get up! For the LORD has given you victory over the Midianite hordes!" He divided the 300 men into three groups and gave each man a ram's horn and a clay jar with a torch in it.

Then he said to them, "Keep your eyes on me. When I come to the edge of the camp, do just as I do. As soon as I and those with me blow the rams' horns, blow your horns, too, all around the entire camp, and shout, 'For the LORD and for Gideon!'"

It was just after midnight, after the changing of the guard, when Gideon and the 100 men with him reached the edge of the Midianite camp. Suddenly, they blew the rams' horns and broke their clay jars.

Then all three groups blew their horns and broke their jars. They held the blazing torches in their left hands and the horns in their right hands, and they all shouted, "A sword for the LORD and for Gideon!"

Each man stood at his position around the camp and watched as all the Midianites rushed around in a panic, shouting as they ran to escape.

When the 300 Israelites blew their rams' horns, the LORD caused the warriors in the camp to fight against each other with their swords. Those who were not killed fled to places...far away...

Now you may wonder what all of this has to do with the introduction of the sermon when I talked about the challenging times we have been through in our church lately.

Well, notice this...

The light became effective only when the vessel that held it was broken.

God knows that when things are easy for us, our tendency is not only to get lazy, but to take the credit for our success and to fail to give Him the honor and glory He deserves.

So He breaks us.

Sometimes He does that by allowing us to fall on the cement. At other times, He simply allows us to smash against one another.

Whatever the method He chooses, His purpose is the same – to allow the light of Christ to shine out from our midst.

Even Paul experienced these same times of brokenness and struggle and even depression.

Verses 8-10

We may be...

- pressed and distressed
- perplexed – meaning we are without resources and in doubt about what we should do next. We may even be embarrassed by our situation
- harassed and mistreated
- knocked off of our feet

But we are not...

- crushed in our spirits
- utterly destitute of all resources, in despair, and without hope
- abandoned by God or His Holy Spirit
- brought to ruin or destroyed by the circumstances around us

Those of us who were here on Wednesday night heard these very sentiments expressed among those who participated in our family meeting.

Verses 16-18

David Platt, *Radical*

In direct contradiction to the American dream, God actually delights in exalting our inability. He intentionally puts his people in situations where they come face to face with their need for him. In the process he powerfully demonstrates his ability to provide everything his people need in ways they could never have mustered up or imagined.

This is how God works. He puts his people in positions where they are desperate for his power, and then he shows his provision in ways that display his greatness.

The reality is that it doesn't matter how many resources the church has. The church I lead could have all the man-made resources that one could imagine, but apart from the power of the Holy Spirit, such a church will do nothing of significance for the glory of God...His power is so superior to ours. Why do we not desperately seek it?

God delights in using ordinary Christians who come to the end of themselves and choose to trust in his extraordinary provision. He stands ready to allocate his power to all who are radically dependent on him and radically devoted to making much of him. (p. 47, 48, 54, 56)

The gospel is about Jesus – about what He has done in our lives and for His purpose. And looking across this congregation, I can see the evidence of how God has worked miracles.

We have seen God change hearts and lives of people who are here today. We have seen Him heal where the condition of each person seemed beyond the scope of modern medicine.

That is the testimony upon which we stand.

Video: *Cardboard Testimonies*